

Stepping
on the
Blender

¢

Other Times Life Gets Messy

Katherine Snow Smith

Stepping on the Blender & Other Times Life Gets Messy
Copyright © 2023 Katherine Snow Smith
All rights reserved.

ISBN 979-8-9877247-0-5 paperback

ISBN 919-8- 9877247-1-2 ebook

Library of Congress Control Number 2023918181

The contents of this book are the intellectual property of Katherine Snow Smith. Except for brief excerpts for reviews of the work, no portion of the text and no image can be reproduced in any form without written permission of the author. Please contact her through the publisher at the address below.

Illustrations: Alli Arnold

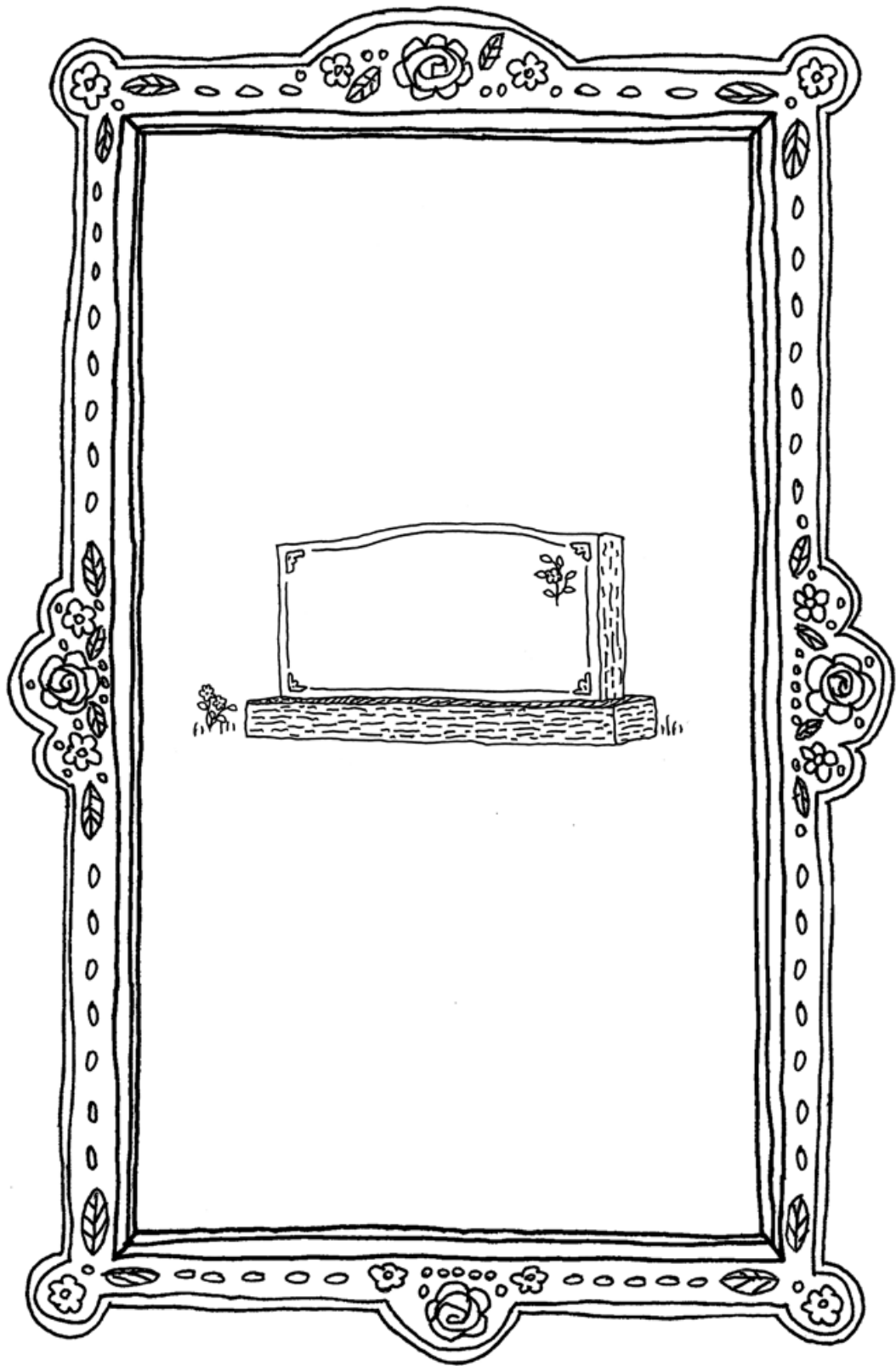
Cover photo and author's portrait: Zack Wittman

Illustration of Book Pocketbooks logo: Lee Burgess

Book design: Kelly Prelipp Lojk

LYSTRA BOOKS
& Literary Services

Published by
Lystra Books & Literary Services, LLC
391 Lystra Estates Drive, Chapel Hill, NC 27517
lystrabooks@gmail.com



— 20 —

With My People

The day before my father's funeral, frost dusted the grass at the cemetery, but the January ground wasn't frozen. When I pushed the wire stem of the small blue plastic flag into the ground to mark his burial plot, it entered the earth easily. The cemetery manager explained to me that a family member is asked to mark it to safeguard against anyone being buried in the wrong place. He provided me with a map and contract showing the site my parents had bought decades earlier.

I knew without the paperwork that this was the spot because of the grave to the left.

The marker read "GLAD2BEME" in bronze letters beneath my sister's name: Melinda Jean Snow. The phrase had appeared on her personalized license plate. She died at age 31 in a car accident. Daddy died 25 years later of pneumonia on her birthday, January 14.

"So then your mother will go right there on the right of your father when her time comes," the manager said as

he pointed to a plot on the right of where I planted my father's little plastic flag.

"This is a tough time to be thinking about this, but is there any room around here for me?" I asked, surveying the hilltop that seemed filled with tombstones and markers. "I got divorced a few years ago so I guess I no longer have a plan for where I'll end up."

"I doubt it, but let's go back to the office and check," he said. Shockingly, there was one space available next to my sister's and parents' plots. I plan to be cremated, but he said I could have a marker and my ashes there. I told him I'd decide after I got through my father's funeral.

Like my parents, I'm not one to frequent cemeteries. They placed flowers on Melinda's grave on every birthday but weren't regulars. A neighbor down the street drove past our house every afternoon on his way to his wife's grave.

"There goes Bob to visit Marion," Daddy would say. "Must be 5 o'clock."

We didn't talk much about death, but my father said from time to time he was fond of the phrase the Irish used when proposing marriage: "Will you be buried with my people?"

The storied family burial grounds aren't as common now as families disperse thousands of miles beyond their original village, town, state or country.

As a child I explored the headstones of members of my father's family at the cemetery at Snow Hill Baptist Church in Dobson, North Carolina. During summer visits to his Surry County birthplace, Daddy took Melinda and me to the graves of his parents and other relatives. He and I took my son, Wade, on the same sojourn decades later. It was more of a history lesson than a somber memorial.

Daddy wanted us to understand how unusual it was that my grandfather, Byrd Winfield Snow, was born in 1862 during the Civil War. My grandmother, Ida Victoria Snow, whose middle name is the same as mine, was born 20 years later. Together they raised 16 children, my father being the youngest. His father was 64 when my father was born, then he didn't become a father to Melinda until he was 41, and to me at 44. So that's how the math works for children born in the 1960s to have a grandfather born during the Civil War.

Wade and I took photos at the graves belonging to great, great uncles, Frost Snow and Ice Snow, who moved to Surry County from England in the early 1800s. Daddy was proud of the humor in the family tree.

Beyond names on headstones, people's many different preferences for how they will be laid to rest are interesting, and at times, even humorous.

A friend recounted the story of an eccentric man in his small town who asked to be placed face down in his casket so that when people paid their respects they could "kiss my ass goodbye."

My oldest daughter, Olivia, led me to the Westwood Village Memorial Park during a visit to Los Angeles. She had researched the celebrities buried there and knew some lore.

Marilyn Monroe's crypt is usually covered with kisses made by red lipstick from the lips of fans paying their respects. Hugh Hefner, founder of *Playboy* magazine, bought the crypt next to her so he would eventually be laid to rest beside the famous beauty who appeared on the cover of the first issue of his magazine.

Talk show host Merv Griffin is also buried at Westwood.

His gravestone reads, "I will NOT be back right after these messages."

Roosevelt, one of the oldest of my father's 15 siblings, had his gravestone erected several years before he died. It was one of the biggest markers in the small cemetery next to his church in Dobson. Roosevelt liked to drive by and admire it. He purposely picked a plot near the edge so it was visible from the road, and he joked his family members could just drive by and toss flowers right over the fence.

He and his wife, Eva, were married 73 years. When the two were in their 90s, my father asked his sister-in-law if she ever dated anyone else before she married Roosevelt.

"Yes, I did. Two different young men. They're both dead now," she said matter-of-factly. "I should have married one of them."

Though they bickered, they were devoted to each other. When Roosevelt died, Eva wanted a living room chair placed by the window facing the cemetery so she could look out toward him every day until she was buried next to him.

A few weeks after my father died, I went back to the Raleigh cemetery and bought the plot next to my parents and sister. I told the cemetery manager that I remembered the headline of a column my dad wrote decades ago when he and my mom first bought their plots that read: "It's Not Like Bringing a New Baby Home."

"He sure was right about that," I said.

"Everybody in this town loved your father," the manager said, "because no matter their politics, their profession or whatever, he said what people were thinking so much of the time."

He went on to tell me about how at least 15 years earlier, the former cemetery director was so proud of a fancy new sign with a digital screen that flashed the time and temperature.

“Well, your daddy called up here and said he thought it was in poor taste and that this was a place of peace and reflection not a bank, a sports arena or a Las Vegas hotel. Nobody wants the time and temperature flashing all night long,” the manager said. “He was right. A lot of people were complaining to me about the clock, but your father was the only one calling the director. Finally, our boss came in one day and said, ‘Mr. Snow has worn me down. If he puts this in his column the whole town’s gonna be after me. I’m shutting down the clock.’”

This story was a gift as I wrote the check for my cemetery plot. I laughed and felt such a closeness to Daddy.

I don’t know the right words to describe the pain my parents felt when they had to purchase a cemetery plot for Melinda long before her time. I will call them brave and strong for going on to live good, meaningful lives even as they missed her tremendously. They could be content knowing they raised Melinda and me to be “GLAD2BME.” I hope I somehow manage the same for my children.

I take comfort knowing no matter where my uncertain life takes me, I’ll be buried with my people. And no time or temperature will be flashing all night long.

